



Russian River Biological Opinion Update – November 2015

The Sonoma County Water Agency is continually planning and implementing the Russian River Biological Opinion requirements. The following project updates provide a brief synopsis of current work. For more detailed information about these activities, please visit www.sonomacountywater.org.

Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement Project

- Water Agency Staff are performing the implementation and effectiveness monitoring of habitat features constructed for the Dry Creek Mile 1 Demonstration Project
- The draft Environmental Impact Report for miles two through six of habitat enhancement was released on July 11. A public hearing was held on August 11. Comments were due by 5 p.m. August 24, and were received from Caltrans, the Russian River Watershed Protection Committee, and one landowner in the project area. It is anticipated that the final EIR will go to Water Agency Board of Directors for approval on November 17, 2015.
- Site identification, environmental studies and topographic surveys are nearly complete for the second and third miles of habitat enhancement. Two firms, Interfluve and ESA, are designing the second and third miles of habitat enhancement, respectively. The Water Agency and regulatory agencies have provided comments on the Mile 2 60% designs, and Inter-Fluve is incorporating them into the 90% design. The Water Agency and Regulatory Agencies are currently reviewing the Mile 3 60% designs. Water Agency staff are in the process of meeting with landowners to receive input on the 60% designs.
- Three firms were selected for design of miles four through six of habitat enhancement: Interfluve, ESA and Cardno. The Water Agency is currently identifying potential project sites and negotiating design contracts with each firm.

Fish Monitoring

The inflatable dam is not in use this year, due to the work on the Mirabel Fish Passage Improvement Project. Without the dam, the Water Agency cannot use the video monitors traditionally deployed to count migrating adult Chinook, steelhead and coho. Instead, the agency installed a type of sonar technology (known as DIDSON) at the mouth of Dry Creek and has installed a video monitor at the Healdsburg fish ladder. As of October 21, the Water Agency has observed a total of 1 Chinook and 3 steelhead on the Dry Creek DIDSON and 11 Chinook at the Healdsburg fish ladder this season. The low counts are likely related to the closure of the river mouth at Jenner. As required in the Temporary Urgency Change Order, the Water Agency is also conducting dive survey for adult salmonids. One small adult chinook has been observed.

Mirabel Screen and Fish Ladder Replacement

Construction of the Mirabel Fish Passage Improvement Project is proceeding, with construction anticipated to be complete early next year. A temporary (coffer) dam that was installed at Wohler Bridge to create a backwater pool in order to meet projected summer water demands is being removed the week of October 26 in anticipation of winter rains.

Russian River Estuary Management Project

- The 2015 Lagoon Management Period ended on October 15. The barrier beach closed on September 8, self-breached on October 4 and closed again on October 10. The Water Agency is tentatively scheduled to breach the barrier beach on Monday, November 2, when estuary water levels are estimated to reach 8.7 feet. However, the breaching date could change, given predicted challenging beach conditions.
- Baseline pinniped monitoring is conducted regularly. Water quality monitoring at datasonde stations is ongoing; weekly nutrient and bacteria monitoring has concluded for the season. Estuary fisheries and invertebrate monitoring have also concluded for the season.
- Field investigations of the jetty are complete. In 2014, monitoring wells were installed and other tests were conducted. The purpose of the studies is to determine if and how the jetty impacts the formation of the barrier beach and lagoon water surface elevation. Consultants are currently analyzing data and preparing a report, which is expected to be released this fall.

Fish Flow Project

Work is occurring internally on the preparation of the draft Environmental Impact Report for the Fish Habitat Flows and Water Rights Project. The EIR is being prepared by Water Agency staff, with assistance from consultants on some areas of impact analysis. A draft EIR is anticipated to be released Winter 2015-16.

Interim Flow Changes

On May 1, the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) issued a Temporary Urgency Change Order (TUCO) for Russian River flows. The change was requested by the Water Agency to preserve water in Lake Mendocino. Within a few days of the order being issued, the Water Agency was informed by PG&E of its pending request to reduce diversions from the Eel River through its Potter Valley Project, as a result of the drought. The reduction represents a loss of about 30-100 acre-feet of water per day. To preserve water in the lake, the Water Agency went back to the State Water Board to request additional reductions in releases from Lake Mendocino; on June 17, the State Water Board issued an amendment to the TUCO. As a result, the minimum flow requirement in the upper river was 25 cfs and 50 cfs in the lower river.

The current TUCO expired on October 27. PG&E filed another variance with FERC to reduce flows in order to perform major maintenance on its penstock. In order to preserve water in Lake Mendocino, the Water Agency plans to file another TUCP with the State Water Board.

Public Outreach, Reporting & Legislation

- The annual Dry Creek Community meeting will be held on January 14 at 6:00 p.m.
- In November an informational flyer will be sent to Dry Creek residents updating them on the project.



Construction of Mirabel Fish Passage Improvement Project, week of October 19.

